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## **The Sustainable Development Goals and the Social and Solidarity Economy**

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### *Abstract*

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) - which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) - is the current global agenda against which every country is benchmarking its progress. The SDGs encapsulate 17 development goals, sharing the key theme of 'leaving no one behind'. Many of the grassroots concerns are of an integrated focus, impacting the economic, social and environmental concerns, including human rights and good governance. The SDGs widened the development agenda and, therefore, essentializing the critical link for the localization of SDGs. The social and solidarity economy (SSE) makes an impact as its organizations (or SSE organizations and enterprises (SSEOs)) at the grassroots are working with the most vulnerable communities as a vehicle for achieving effective localisation of SDGs. In this entry, through policy discussions and case studies, the SDG and SSE link is provided.

*Keywords:* community economy; people economy; sustainable development goals (SDGs); HLPF; Seoul; UNTFSSSE

## **Introduction**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015-2030) illustrate that we are one global human family. We are interconnected. Issues of poverty, ill health, and natural disasters have an impact directly or indirectly on all the people and nations of the world.

Today, the SDGs represent the global development agenda. Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the SDGs, and ensuring follow-up and review over the coming 15 years, at the national, regional and global levels. However, according to the SDG 17, which concerns partnerships, there is also a place for all stakeholders (government, business, academia, civil society and local community) to play a role.

This entry, after a brief summary of the global development agenda, will explain the relationship between SDGs and social and solidarity economy (SSE) principles and models to illustrate the compatibility of the two, and showcase SSE as a community-based strategy for the effective localising of SDGs.

### **1. From the MDGs (2000-2015) to the SDGs (2015 – 2030)**

The global development agenda between 2000 and 2015 was entitled the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was a set of eight development goals and applied only to the developing world. It had a strong emphasis on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, alongside a focus on addressing gender equality and women empowerment, as well as reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. It also aimed to achieve universal primary education. Two other development agendas were combating diseases including HIV/Aids and malaria, and ensuring environmental sustainability. These were envisioned as possible with global partnership, especially regarding financing for development for poor developing nations.

The assessment of the implementation of the MDGs revealed that while there was progress made by some countries, there were major gaps in the development agenda, as well as the delivery. This matter was the subject of the conversation at the Rio Plus 20 Summit on sustainable development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 20 to 22 June 2012. At the end of the Summit, a consensus document was released entitled the “Future we want” which provided a global common vision (United Nations 2012). The Summit also established a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and a global consultation process was instituted by engaging major groups and stakeholders in formulating the post-MDG global development agenda. Rio recognised the critical need for political leadership to ensure that the next 15 year agenda had a greater impact in addressing global concerns.

There were also shifts in the thinking behind the development agenda. The earlier work of Amartya Sen entitled *Development as Freedom* was making inroads into policy discussions (Sen 1999). Therefore, the linkage of development and the human rights agenda gained traction. Amartya Sen’s call was a shift away from focusing on the narrow development agenda such as increasing personal incomes, or focusing on the gross national product, by expanding the development process towards linking development with capabilities. He called for an inclusive agenda by the integration of economic, social,

and political considerations. His was a shift in focus from income deprivation to capability deprivation, as he saw the linkage between illiteracy, ill-health and undernourishment on the one hand, and better education and health provisions which will have a positive impact on earning higher incomes on the other.

The global conversation was calling for a major shift towards a far more comprehensive and integrated agenda between economic, social, environmental, and human rights concerns.

By 2015, there had already been some global consensus on the future agenda and on September 25th 2015, at the UN in New York, world leaders accepted the SDGs as the post-2015 development agenda. They agreed to a global agenda entitled “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”(United Nations 2015).

The central theme of the SDGs is ‘leaving no one behind’. It was agreed that this global agenda was relevant to all member states of the UN, not just the developing countries, as it was recognised that, even within developed nations, there are individuals who are disadvantaged and might be in danger of being left behind. The SDGs contain three dimensions of sustainable development, namely economic, social, and environmental concerns including human rights and good governance. There are 17 goals compared to the MDGs which had only 8 goals. The SDGs are a more comprehensive agenda with 169 targets and 231 unique indicators. It is a 15-year global agenda targeting action between 2015 and 2030.

The SDGs provide a unique opportunity to integrate five dimensions of development, as illustrated in Table 24.1.

Table 24.1: Five SDG dimensions of development

<b>5 Ps</b>	<b>Dimensions of development</b>
PEOPLE SDG 1,2,3,4,5	Human development including personal freedoms. Addressing poverty, health, education, and gender as must essential.
PROSPERITY SDG 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	Wealth creation, economic growth and equitable distribution. Decent work, cities, addressing inequality, production, and consultation are important aspects.
PLANET SDG 6, 12, 13,14 and 15	Environment - sustainable and responsible use of resources. Sustainability and the management of natural resources as an asset is key to life in the water and on the land, including managing the forest and climate change concerns.
PEACE SDG 16	Community solidarity, inter-ethnic, and religious harmony. Accountability and good governance is essential, including independent institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission.
PARTNERSHIP SDG17	Cooperation among sectors such as public, private, and voluntary at the global, regional, national, and local level is essential. Technical and financial support is also essential.

These 17 goals, 169 targets, and 231 unique indicators make up a very comprehensive and cross-cutting development agenda encompassing economic, social, and cultural aspects, as well as civil and political rights. The SDGs have a very strong collaborative

aspect and while the governments are being held accountable for implementation, the partnership of all stakeholders is of utmost importance in the success of the implementation.

Once in four years, each country is given an opportunity to share its achievements and challenges at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) which meets every year in July at the UN headquarters in New York. The process is called the Voluntary National Review (VNR). While this is not like the Universal Periodical Review (UPR), which has a more rigorous process of review, within the VNR, each country gets an opportunity to showcase how it is implementing the SDGs once every four years.

The HLPF has become the global space for conversations surrounding the implementation of models via the formal process of the VNR, or through side events hosted by member states and stakeholders. Here the SSE model or approach is often featured by governments, UN agencies, civil society, and academics.

The SDGs' goals, targets and indicators seem like a mammoth task for member states to deliver and therefore, there is a need for workable grassroots models in addressing the 17 concerns in an integrated and impactful way. Hence, the means of implementation and financing for development are key. This is where SSE actors are advocating that the SSE may act as a vehicle for an effective intervention strategy for the realisation of the SDGs at the local grassroots levels.

### **1. Relationships between the SDGs and the SSE**

Both concepts of the SSE and the SDGs have close parallels. Explaining the relationship is a helpful exercise to establish the SSE as a vehicle for the realisation of SDGs, especially at the grassroots local level, and in ensuring no person or community is left behind.

Peter Utting (2015) provides a useful definition of the SSE as collective action in the production of goods and services by communities, cooperatives, associations, and social enterprises. All these economic activities are people-centred and environmentally sensitive. He further identifies the values associated with the SSE, such as cooperation, solidarity, triple bottom line, and democratic governance (also see the entry "Contemporary understandings of the SSE").

In a similar way, Ben Quinones (2020) articulates a fivefold dimension of SSE. These dimensions include firstly the triple bottom line of people, planet (environment) and profits (economy), then it's socially responsible governance, and finally, edifying ethical values. In SSE collective accountability, democratic decision making and transparency are important. The transformative dimension of SSE is its edifying values, which are not just taking a person out of poverty, but empowering individuals for a collective and collaborative vision.

Figure 24.1. Five dimensions of SSE

## Socially Responsible Governance



*(Figure designed by Chandra Firmantoko (ASEC Indonesia 2022))*

Identifying the commonalities between the SDGs and the SSE in terms of the foci is an important exercise, as the five SDG dimensions appear in parallel to the SSE dimensions, with notable synergy between them. It is also important to note that the SSE provides a community focus intervention strategy and a platform to realise the potential of community-led integrated approaches in localising the SDGs.

In this context, Table 24.2 draws the parallel dimensions and points to the rich potential of the SSE for the realisation of the SDGs.

Table 24.2. SDGs and SSE local community potential

SDGS	SSE	SSE potential for the SDG realisation
People	People	People are at the heart of development. The SSE sees people in an integrated and inclusive way.
Planate	Planet	SSE has a greater appreciation of the environment and of intergenerational sustainability.
Prosperity	Profits	The SSE creates a more just and equitable share of the resources, especially wealth distribution in the context of wealth creation.
Peace	Governance	SSE empowers local communities at the grassroots to be in direct control of the organization and directly benefiting from it. People’s participation and joint cooperation are central to all SSEOs. SSE governance structure is to be participatory and accountable to the people.

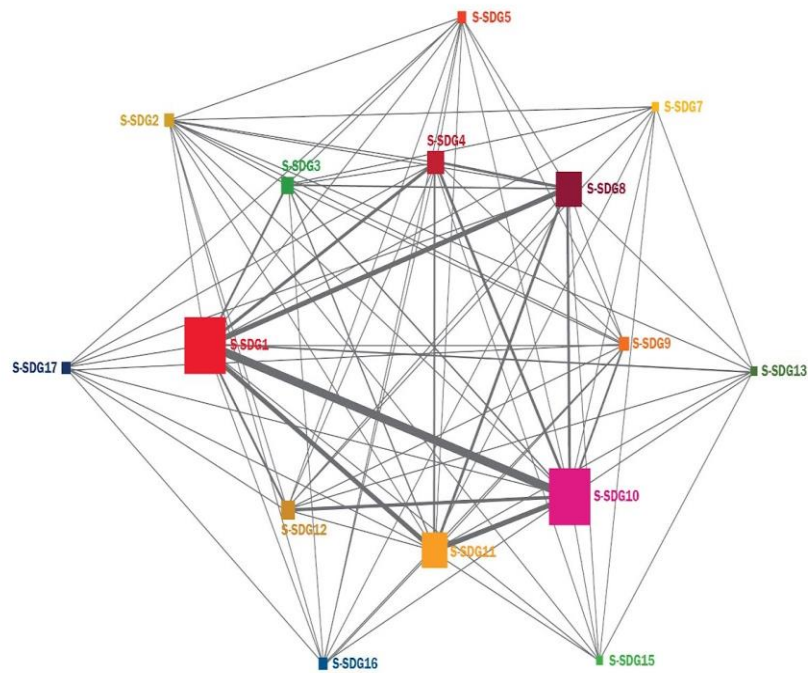
Partnership	Values	SSE fosters value transformation such as appreciation of diversity, respect of human dignity, self-respect, and fundamental human rights.
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These commonalities make an increasing number of governments look at SSE as a means of implementation of the SDGs. Given its association with localized circuits of production, exchange and consumption, SSEOs can be conducive to not only basic needs provisioning but also local economic development, based on sustainable production and consumption, as well as local reinvestment. Its values and principles centred around democracy, solidarity, and social cohesion have considerable potential to reduce inequalities. Further, given the active participation of women, SSE can have a significant impact on women’s economic, social, and political empowerment. The patterns of production and consumption practised by SSEOs tend to be more sensitive to local environmental conditions than those of for-profit enterprises. In addition to these economic, social, and environmental attributes, SSE has a political dimension: it involves forms of resistance, mobilization, and active citizenship that can challenge the structures that generate social, economic, and environmental injustice.

Active in almost all economic sectors, SSEs have been shown to contribute to all 17 SDGs. However, specific socio-economic and environmental contexts, and sometimes political contexts at the national or local level, determine the SDGs which SSEOs seek to achieve. According to the UNRISD’s study on the contribution of SSEOs to the SDGs in Seoul, the contribution of SSEOs was particularly prominent in the areas of SDG 10 (Reduce all forms of inequality), SDG 1 (End poverty in all its forms), SDG 11 (Inclusive, safe and sustainable cities for all citizens), SDG 8 (Inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work), SDG 4 (Quality education and lifelong learning), SDG 12 (Sustainable consumption and production), SDG 3 (Good health and well-being) and SDG 9 (Infrastructure and industrialization)(Yi et al. 2018).

Figure 24.2. How Seoul’s SSEOs contribute to the SDGs : Tracing the pathways





Note: *The size of a square represents the number of CSEs directly contributing to implementation of that specific S-SDG. The thickness of a line represents the degree to which CSEs contributing to that S-SDG also contribute to other S-SDGs. (For example, CSEs contributing to S-SDG 1 are more likely to contribute to S-SDG 10 than to S-SDG17.)*

(Source: Yi et al. 2018)

Key goals such as SDG 12 on “Ensuring Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns” are particularly relevant, as many SSEOs have in their charters a commitment to environmental sustainability. SSEOs also help achieve goals such as SDG 8 and, in particular, target 8.4 which aims to “Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation...”. This is because SSEOs strive to consider the wellbeing of their employees as a key objective and not solely focus on the financial return from it’s activities.

## 1. Promoting the SSE as a means of implementation of the SDGs at the global level

Various global or supranational processes and agreements are already underway to support the SSE as a means of implementation of the SDGs. The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on SSE (UNTFSSSE) established in 2013 has been a key organization to promote the SSE as a means of implementation of the SDGs. Composed of members (18 UN agencies) and observers (15 international and regional organizations working on SSE issues), it is taking the lead in the popularisation of the SSE through their policy dialogues, research, documentation, and advocacy work within and beyond the UN system. It has raised the visibility of the SSE, as well as documented the contributions of SSE actors to implementing SDGs. In particular, in 2018, the UNTFSSSE established the Knowledge Hub for the SDGs, making a great contribution to raising awareness and visibility of the SSE as a vehicle for the implementation of SDGs. Currently the International Labour Organisation (ILO) hosts UNTFSSSE's secretariat and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) plays the role of the implementing agency of the Knowledge Hub for the SDGs (also see the entry "Globalization, alter-globalization and SSE").

In 2021, the 341st Governing Body (GB) of the ILO decided to place on the agenda of the 110th Session (2022) of the International Labour Conference (ILC) an item related to "SSE for a human-centred future of work" for general discussion, which directly relates to the implementation of the SDGs.

International and regional organisations focusing or based in the Global North are also active in promoting the SSE, but the connection between the SSE and the SDGs are not as explicit as the UN agencies. For instance, OECD is actively promoting social economy, but its main focus is largely on entrepreneurship and local development. On the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the International Summit on Social Economy for an Inclusive, Sustainable and Fair Recovery was organized in Toledo, Spain, by the Spanish government. At the Summit the *Toledo Declaration on The Social and Solidarity Economy as a key driver for an inclusive and sustainable future* was adopted with the support of 19 EU Member States. In 2021, the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights of the European Union adopted the European Action Plan for Social Economy after a long consultation process involving citizens and stakeholders. The Plan follows other initiatives by the European Union to support the development of social economy enterprises, such as the 2011 Social Business Initiative (SBI).

International and regional non-government organizations promoting the SSE play a significant role in increasing the potential of the SSE as a means of implementing the SDGs. The EMES International Research Network (EMES), the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF), the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), the International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC), the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), Social Economy Europe and the SSE International Forum are among those key organizations contributing to the achievement of the SDGs at the national and sub-national levels by SSEOs.

### **1. Promoting the SSE to achieve the SDGs at the national and subnational level**

As awareness about the potential of the SSE to implement the SDGs grows, an increasing number of governments, both at national and subnational levels, are adopting policies

and programmes that aim to support SSEOs. National and subnational governments (including municipal, provincial, or state/regional levels of a federal government) are increasingly interested in setting up public policies to promote and support SSE in the context of the growing importance given to local sustainable development policies (including quality local public services), but also widespread reduction of fiscal transfers from the central government (Yi et al. 2017) (also see the entries “Public policy and SSE” and “Social policy and SSE”). Caught between this fiscal pressure and increased service demands, policy makers seek advice on which policies and programmes are most people-oriented, while being cost-effective in achieving objectives associated with economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their jurisdictions. The SSE is well placed to achieve these objectives because of its defining values and principles of community-centeredness, democratic self-management, solidarity, ethics and cooperation within and beyond organizations. They have considerable potential to reduce inequalities in a local context. For instance, given the active participation of women, SSE can significantly contribute toward women’s economic, social and political empowerment (Yi et al. 2018).

The links between the SSE and the SDGs at the national level are often explicitly mentioned in the VNR for the HLPF of the UN, where the performance and success of the SDGs at the national level is reported.

**Box 24.1: Links between the SDG and SSE at the national level: Malaysian VNR**

A specific reference to social and community enterprises was made in the 2021 VNR report of Malaysia. The report recognized the contribution of social economy and the role of community actors, especially cooperative and social enterprise networks in achieving the SDGs as follows.

The VNR acknowledged there are alternative economic models to the dominant economic model, which is for private equity and individual business. It also highlighted the roles of community forestry, and indigenous and local communities in achieving the SDGs. There is a sense of openness, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of the poor and informal sector, and the role of local communities in the support for local economies.

The recognition of the links between the SSE and the SDGs are also observed in the recent public policies to promote the SSE, such as the National Entrepreneurship Policy, the Malaysian Social Enterprise Blueprint and the Malaysian Cooperative Transformation Plan. Through these policies, the cooperative provisions and the social enterprise accreditation are recognised as creating a new avenue for businesses to undertake a greater social and environmental responsibility. Source: Malaysia (2021)

The ambitious vision for transformation laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its core principle of ‘leaving no one behind’ can be realized only if the economic, social, and political structures and relations generating injustice are corrected at multiple levels of governance. With a wide range of political, economic, social, and environmental problems — as well as opportunities for progress — to be found at the local level, translating this global agenda into national as well as local solutions in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas is key to achieving the SDGs. While attempts were made to

“localize” the MDGs, progress towards their achievement was mainly assessed in terms of national averages, which obscured the fact that multidimensional inequalities were increasing within and between urban and rural areas in both developed and developing countries. Acknowledging the importance of implementing the SDGs in all localities and for all communities, the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the role of local authorities and communities in strengthening sustainable ecosystems, promoting local culture and products, fostering community cohesion and personal security, and stimulating innovation and employment. SDG 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) is a manifestation of the importance of localizing the SDGs (Yi, Yi, and Lee 2017)

**Box 24.2: Links between the SDG and the SSE at the sub-national level**

One of the most interesting achievements in terms of the contribution of the SSEOs to achieving the SDGs at the subnational level is the UNTFSSSE Knowledge Hub for SDGs, in particular its collection of papers submitted to the 2019 UNTFSSSE International Conference “Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: What Role for Social and Solidarity Economy” held on 25-26 June 2019 (Yi et al. 2019). The papers submitted to the conference aimed to systematically analyse the contribution of the SSE to the SDGs at the local level, through the analysis of SSE development in different regions and territories, examination of the role of SSE as a means of implementation for the SDGs in diverse local contexts, and identification of robust methodologies and innovative solutions for measuring SSE and its impacts. These submitted papers, that is, 43 studies on the contribution of SSEOs to achieving the SDGs in different parts of the world, showed that the goals on Poverty Reduction (SDG 1), Decent Work (SDG 8), Gender Equality (SDG 5), and Sustainable Production and Consumption (SDG 12) are among those most strongly associated with the SSEs’ objectives (Alarcón et al. 2022).

**1. The SSE and the SDGS in grassroots communities**

SSE can address multiple objectives of sustainable development in an inclusive, democratic and sustainable manner. Through localized circuits of production, exchange and consumption, SSE is conducive not only to basic needs provisioning but also to local economic development more generally. It can enhance the capacity of local producers and communities to increase added value, and stimulate demand for locally produced goods and services. SSE can also contribute to retaining a greater share of income and generating tax revenues for the local area. Solidarity, social cohesion, and collective action, which are key characteristics of SSE, can facilitate cooperation among local actors to improve basic infrastructure and social services, as well as promote the economic, social, and political empowerment of vulnerable or otherwise excluded groups, in particular women. These roles and functions of the SSE in promoting local sustainable development, specifically the SSE-SDG links, are best illustrated through the work of community-based organisations.

**Box 24.3: The Association for Sarva Seva farms (ASSEFA)**

ASSEFA is rooted in Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya (a path of non-violence) in building a society where equality and freedom for all human beings is central. It is a vision for rural development which adopts a decentralised approach of democracy, decision-making, and collective action.

ASSEFA is currently operating in 10,000 villages and touching the lives of more than 1,845,700 rural families in Tamil Nadu. Majority of the rural folk are involved in the agricultural economy and are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood (Jayasooria 2022).

ASSEFA at the village level undertakes a holistic range of interventions which encompasses improvement of the quality of life, which incorporates health and hygiene, education, gender equality, and justice and community resources for sustainability, which are associated with multiple SDGs such as SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 2 on hunger, SDG 3 on good health, SDG 4 on education, SDG 5 on gender, and SDG 16 on justice and non-discrimination.

One example of the effective economic and sustainable programs at the village level is the dairy farms undertaken by families, especially women, involving the care and milking of cows. These impact SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on creating economic opportunity, SDG 10 on addressing inequality, and SDG 12 on consumption and production.

Yvon Porirer and Kumar Logathan (2019) describe ASSEFA as a large-scale organisation which embodies all aspects of development, namely women's empowerment, business development, and environmental concerns, as well as human rights, housing, and food needs of the poor. It highlights how ASSEFA delivers almost all the SDGs addressing human concern.

**Box 24.4: Community-owned Pawn Shops in Malaysia**

Malaysian media documented a surprising development during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown in mid-2020. When the lockdown was lifted, many individuals were making a beeline to pawn shops (Hassan 2020). This incident showed the vulnerable position of low income families, especially those from the informal sector, as well as the self-employed individuals who have neither enough savings nor a social protection plan.

One major alternative initiative was established by faith-based institutions based on Islamic principles and guidelines. It is inclusive as this service is accessible to people of all faiths (Jayasooria 2021).

The Cooperative laws (Cooperative Act 1993) were amended to enable cooperatives to establish pawn shops as collective enterprises. Among the cooperatives it is estimated that 90 cooperatives manage Islamic pawn shops and the Cooperative bank known as Bank Rakyat manages 42 outlets (Hanifkuala 2014).

The pawn shops address both SDG 1 and SDG 10 in addressing poverty and inequality, providing access to credit in times of financial uncertainty. There is a collective dimension, as these pawn shops shown are community owned and therefore closer to SSE due to its compliance for SSE collective ownership and ethical values in meeting human needs.

## Conclusion

Although development discourse and practice consistently emphasize the importance of localizing international and national development strategies and goals, results thus far have been less than satisfactory. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, which is built upon the principle of 'leaving no one behind', localizing the SDGs is essential for realizing the vision of transformation *everywhere* for *everyone*. In this context, the SSE, rooted in the local context, plays a significant role in achieving the SDGs at the local level. SSEOs are mostly organized by and for the most vulnerable, and are being mobilised to address their concerns at the local level. The SSE, which may be organised in different ways, (such as cooperatives, self-help groups, social enterprises, village communities or informal groups) plays a role in the realisation of SDGs at the local level. As we can see in the cases of India and Malaysia, the links between the SSE and the SDGs, or the contribution of the SSE to achieving the SDGs are particularly visible in community-based organizations, which are often intertwined with broader social struggles to promote the interests of the most vulnerable and to strengthen the collective right of communities to be engaged in designing projects and laws affecting their lands or environment. They are making a difference in the lives of ordinary and vulnerable people and the SSE communities are contributing towards the localising of SDGs ensuring no one is left behind.

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